

Good Friday Sermon. Fr. Hugh. St. George. 4.16.11

Texts: Isaiah 53. Psalm 22. John 19.

There have been an inconceivably huge number of acts of grave injustice and abominable cruelty that have taken place in the history of our world.

The most ironic of all the countless million acts of brutality that have ever occurred, took place nearly 2,000 years ago, on a spring day. The high priests and leaders of the religious Jewish tribe handed over an innocent man to the occupying Roman forces and demanded that he be tortured to death.

Although the powerful Roman Governor could find absolutely no crime that he was guilty of, he acceded to their demand.

That very same day Jesus was whipped, and tortured to death. A famous historian of that era, Cicero, described crucifixion as being the most cruel and hideous method of torture.

Some people have told me that they hate Good Friday. That seems a natural enough response. It is indeed a terrible thing to contemplate – the legally sanctioned, horribly violent execution of the Son of God who had come to live among us.

Who really wants to think about that?

Yet it is right and responsible of us to be here and to make ourselves think about it.

How are we to understand His crucifixion?

Why did He have to die such a horrible death?

In some sense, Jesus' death, at the hands of the powers that be, was inevitable.

He was the victim of petty minded people in positions of power, intent on maintaining the status quo. Jesus just would not play along with their corrupt, evil ways.

His exposure of hypocrisy rattled their cages.

His teaching on Love was ridiculous to them.

His message was subversive. He had rocked the boat. He was a revolutionary. He had to go.

As we think back on this travesty we may well feel angry at those who did this thing.

Perhaps, to the Roman soldiers, an execution or two was all in a day's work.

And then his friend, Judas, the High priest, Caiaphas, and the Governor, Pilate, all highly intelligent men, for their own reasons, each betrayed him.

We can feel angry at them - as if it would have been different if we had been there. As if we like the Lone Ranger would have saved the day.

That way we too can wash our hands of the matter.

Or, maybe we make excuses for them, and explain it away as just the way things were back then. After all we're good at making excuses.

Either way, it is more comfortable for us to just think that, that was them doing it back then, and it has nothing to do with us, now.

We would like to dissociate ourselves from what those people did to the Son of God.

The notion that we, modern civilized people had anything to do with the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus is a horrible idea, a very offensive suggestion.

No, we like to be the recipients of the benefits of His teachings and His Love.

But we would rather not take responsibility for His suffering and His death.

Jesus' crucifixion took place at a specific place and time, but its impact transcends time, reaching far back and far forward, always effective in the present moment.

Everyone knows, only too well, about the personal struggle between right and wrong;

between being kind and being hurtful;
the struggle between goodness and sin.

Yes, as I said a moment ago, Jesus' crucifixion was inevitable.

But, it was also voluntary.

He predicted it precisely.

He told His friends that He was going to Jerusalem to give His life, of His own free will.

He referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd who lay down His life for His sheep.

To be sure there were a number of chances He could have taken to avoid it.

But it was the plan that He and His Father God had for saving the doomed human race, for saving us.

To the Jews and the Romans, Jesus' death was punishment.

To God and for us, Jesus' death was redemptive.

It is not by any merit of our own, but by the merit of Jesus' crucifixion, of His voluntary sacrificial death, that we can be the beneficiaries of the forgiveness of sin.

It is by the Cross that we are declared forgiven in the eyes of God; and that we can have the hope of being included in His eternal Kingdom.

And if we are to enjoy the benefits of divine forgiveness and the hope of eternal life, we must recognize our absolute need of it.

We must acknowledge that there have been times in our lives when,

we too have compromised integrity, like Pilate;

times when,

we too have served our own interests, like Judas; times when,

we too have held onto our turf, like Caiaphas.

We know that there have been times when we have colluded with dishonesty - times when we have hurt someone - times when we have transgressed God's holy commandments.

If we are sincere in our desire to receive God's full pardon and forgiveness, we must also be sincere in our acknowledgment that we have sinned against Him.

The first step in overcoming a life-threatening problem such as alcoholism, or drug addiction is to stop denying that you have a problem and admit that you need God's help.

It is the same for each of us in regard to admitting our sin and our need for God's Grace.

Unless we stop denying our sinfulness;

Unless we give up our vain ideas of our own goodness, independent of God's Grace, we cannot and will not be free.

Seven hundred years before the Lord Jesus gave His life on that cross, God spoke through the great prophet Isaiah and said:

“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us turned to his own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

We need to assertively claim the positive knowledge that we are cleansed through His wounds.

It is only through the Lord Jesus substituting Himself on the Cross to pay the judgment for all of our sins that we are forgiven and made right before God.

Our salvation comes through Christ's supreme sacrifice, nothing else.

The word to redeem means to 'buy back'.

It literally means to purchase someone out of slavery.

The Lord Jesus Christ's offer of redemption;

His desire to buy us our freedom from sin and death; His wish to give us eternal life, is not some vague abstract religious concept.

It is real, directly personal and as close to each one of us as the next beat of your heart.

When we really take to heart that His crucifixion directly personally impacts each of us, we will treasure the true worth of the forgiveness that He grants us.

We will value immeasurably the entrance to Heaven that He promises us.

And we will not excuse ourselves of any wrongdoing or sin against Him.

Then we will find a compelling sense of gratitude and joy bubbling up inside, for what God has done for us, through Jesus Christ.

On that day, on that Cross, the last words He spoke, before He breathed His last breath, were:
"It is finished"

It is finished. Jesus Christ has done His Work.

He has paid for sin. He has opened the gates of Heaven to whoever believes in Him and loves Him.

Are you certain that you have fully accepted this reconciliation with God the Father that He has provided?